

December 1, 1997. This increase is the same percentage increase that Social Security beneficiaries and veterans' pension recipients will receive in January. Approximately 2.3 million veterans and over 300,000 surviving spouses and children will benefit from this increase.

Time will never erode the supreme value of our veterans' and servicemembers' efforts in defending the Nation's freedom. We also must not allow it to erode the value of our commitments to them. This legislation ensures that the worth of their richly deserved benefits keeps pace with consumer prices. As such, it maintains our obligation to those individuals whose sacrifices we will always remember.

**William J. Clinton**

The White House,  
November 19, 1997.

NOTE: H.R. 2367, approved November 19, was assigned Public Law No. 105-98.

**Statement on Signing District of  
Columbia Appropriations Legislation**  
*November 19, 1997*

Today I am pleased to have signed into law H.R. 2607, the "District of Columbia Appropriations Act, 1998."

I am particularly pleased that the Act provides sufficient funding to implement the National Capital Revitalization and Self-Government Improvement Act of 1997 (Revitalization Act), which includes the main elements of the plan for the District of Columbia that I proposed in my 1998 budget in February. That plan, which was the most comprehensive plan that any Administration had ever proposed for the District, was designed to achieve two goals: to revitalize Washington, D.C., as the Nation's capital and to improve prospects for "home rule" to succeed. The Congress adopted the Revitalization Act as part of the historic balanced budget agreement that I signed into law last summer. Now, with this 1998 appropriations bill, the Congress has provided the funds to implement it.

The Act also drops several of the objectionable micro-management and other provi-

sions in the original House-passed version of the bill such as Federal funding for private school vouchers, the requirement to reopen Pennsylvania Avenue, the limitation on public assistance payments, the prohibition on Treasury borrowing authority for the District, and restrictions on the District's authority to make improvements in its financial management system.

The Act continues to contain abortion language that would prohibit the use of Federal and District funds to pay for abortions except in cases in which the life of the mother is endangered or in situations involving rape or incest. The continued prohibition on the use of local funds is an unwarranted intrusion into the affairs of the District.

In addition, the Act makes important changes to last year's immigration bill by offering more generous treatment to Central Americans than was available under that bill. These changes make good on the pledge I made during my trip to Central America last spring. Nevertheless, I have several concerns. First, I am troubled by the differences in relief offered to similarly situated persons. I believe, however, that these differences can be minimized in the implementation process. I therefore am asking the Attorney General to consider the ameliorative purposes of this legislation and the unique history and circumstances of the people covered by it in giving effect to its provisions. Second, I believe that similar relief should be made available to Haitians and will seek a legislative solution for this group. Finally, I ask the Congress to revisit its decision to continue to apply some of the harsher rules under last year's immigration bill to other persons with pending immigration cases who are not covered by H.R. 2607. I commend to the public my statement of November 14 for a further discussion of these issues.

**William J. Clinton**

The White House,  
November 19, 1997.

NOTE: H.R. 2607, approved November 19, was assigned Public Law No. 105-100.

## Remarks at the Ecumenical Breakfast

November 20, 1997

Thank you very much and welcome to the White House. I am delighted to see you all. Let me say that we do want to talk about the obligation imposed on all of us to secure a future in which all of us are a part.

But in light of developments in the last day in Iraq, I would like to say just a word about that. The meeting of the foreign ministers last night in Geneva strongly reaffirmed our unanimous position: Saddam Hussein must comply unconditionally with the will of the international community and allow all the weapons inspectors back to Iraq so they can get on with doing their jobs without interference. After that meeting, he said he would do that. In the coming days we will wait and see whether he does, in fact, comply with the will of the international community.

I just want to reiterate that the United States must remain and will remain resolute in our determination to prevent him from threatening his neighbors of the world with nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons. This is an issue that I hope will become even more important to all Americans and a greater subject of discussion. We must do that. That is the duty we have to our children.

Now, let me say I look forward to these meetings every year. I have done, I think, one or two breakfasts like this every year I've been President. And even though we're discussing a kind of public issue today, I get a lot of personal solace out of this, and it always helps me sort of to put things back in perspective. And to give you an idea of how badly we in Washington need things put in perspective here, I got a cartoon out of the *New Yorker Magazine* that is a doctor talking to a patient. You might imagine that the patient is anyone who spends 60 hours a week or more working in this city. The doctor is talking to the patient and he said, "Before we try assisted suicide, Mrs. Rose, let's give the aspirin a chance." [Laughter] I wouldn't say that you're the aspirin—[laughter]—you will alleviate even that, I think.

I'd also like to thank so many of you for the work you've done with us on public is-

suues: on the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, and after the Supreme Court struck it down, on the Federal Executive order I issued, going as far as I could with my executive authority to apply the principles of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act to Federal employees. I thank those of you who worked with Secretary Riley and the Justice Department on the very important work we did to try to clarify the lines of religious expression for students and teachers in our public schools. That, I think, did a great deal of good, and I know that Secretary Riley recently had a summit of religious and education leaders in St. Petersburg to talk about what can be done within the schools to promote racial harmony and to raise performance.

I thank you for the work that many of you have done with us to support the cause of religious freedom around the world. That has become, I think, a very significant issue for many of you in this room and many Americans. And of course, it's still a very important issue—regrettably, it's an important issue in many nations around the world and one that we have to keep working away at.

I also would like to thank you for some of your—some of you have been involved in the America Reads program. I know that the church Hillary and I attend here in Washington regularly has 45 volunteers. I got the newsletter just the other day and the pastor noted that I was not yet one of them. [Laughter]

Many of our religious groups are working on the Welfare to Work Partnership. We have 2,500 private companies now in that effort who have pledged to hire people from welfare to work and they're doing a marvelous job. But very often the houses of worship provide incredibly important services for families and children in transition efforts. This is working. We have 3.8 million fewer people on welfare than we did the day I became President—about almost 2 million fewer people since I signed the welfare reform bill a couple of years ago. And because of the way the system works, our States have even more money now to spend on education and child care and job placement and other supports, which makes the opportunity for people who care about the poor in our society